

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
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P R 021617Z DEC 77

FM AMEMBASSY ATHENS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3588
INFO AMEMBASSY ANKARA
AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS
AMEMBASSY NICOSIA

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 ATHENS 10966

BRUSSELS FOR USEEC

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, GR
SUBJECT: THE NEW DEMOCRACY PARTY EXAMINES ITS LOSSES

1. WITH THE NOVEMBER 20 ELECTIONS AS HISTORY AND THE NEW CABINET FRESHLY APPOINTED, THE NEW DEMOCRACY (ND) PARTY HAS NOW BEGUN TO LICK ITS WOUNDS AND ASK WHY IT SUFFERED A 12 PERCENT LOSS IN ITS POPULAR SUPPORT. MINOR RECRIMINATIONS ARE BEING VOICED AND, AS MIGHT BE EXPECTED, ARE STRONGER AMONG THOSE CANDIDATES WHO WERE NOT REELECTED OR AMONG THOSE PARLIAMENTARIANS WHO CONSIDER THEMSELVES MINISTERIAL TIMBER BUT WHO WERE PASSED OVER BY THE PRIME MINISTER. THIS REACTION IS UNDERSTANDABLE GIVEN THE PARTY'S SETBACK AT THE POLLS AND DOES NOT PRESENT A DANGER TO CARAMANLIS' LEADERSHIP POSITION. OVERALL, THE ND PARTY IS STILL IN POWER WITH A COMFORTABLE MAJORITY AND LOOKING POSITIVELY TO THE FUTURE.

2. ND PARTY MEMBERS USUALLY BEGIN THEIR CRITIQUE BY EXPLAINING THAT THE HISTORIC SUCCESS IN 1974 WAS A HIGHLY ARTIFICIAL RESULT DERIVED FROM THE EMOTIONAL, EUPHORIC ATMOSPHERE OF THE IMMEDIATE POST-JUNTA PERIOD. THEY ASSERT THAT THE 54 PERCENT OF THE VOTE IT
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WON AT THAT TIME INCLUDED SUPPORT FROM THE EXTREME RIGHT, THE CENTER AND, TO A DEGREE, EVEN THE LEFT, ALL OF WHICH JOINED THE RIGHT/CENTER SEGMENT OF THE POLITICAL SPECTRUM WHICH CONSTANTINE CARAMANLIS GENUINELY REPRESENTS. THEREFORE, DEFECTIONS TO BOTH THE FAR RIGHT AND CENTER/LEFT WERE EXPECTED TO ONE DEGREE OR ANOTHER IN THE 1977 ELECTIONS AS VOTERS, INDUCED BY A THREE-YEAR PERIOD OF RELATIVE QUIET, RETURNED TO THEIR TRADITIONAL VOTING

PATTERNS.

3. ND ADHERENTS HAVE NOT CONVEYED UNDUE CONCERN AT THE 6.8 PERCENT OF THE VOTE WHICH WENT TO THE FAR RIGHT NATIONAL CAMP PARTY AND WAS DRAWN ALMOST IN ITS ENTIRETY FROM ND RANKS. SEVERAL ND DEPUTIES HAVE TOLD US THEY AGREE WITH THE CLAIM BY CARAMANLIS THAT THE EXTREME RIGHT WAS DEALT A DECISIVE SETBACK IN THE 1977 ELECTIONS. MANY SEEM, INDEED, RELIEVED THAT THE LARGE DEFECTION TO THE NATIONAL CAMP PREDICTED EARLIER IN SOME CIRCLES DID NOT IN FACT MATERIALIZE, AND PORTRAY THIS AS EVIDENCE OF THE GROWING POLITICAL MATURITY OF THE GREEK ELECTORATE. DEVELOPMENTS WILL, OF COURSE, BE WATCHED, AND IF A TREND SEEMS TO BE BUILDING TOWARD THE FAR RIGHT, THEY MAINTAIN, UNDOUBTEDLY COUNTERMEASURES WILL BE UNDERTAKEN. BUT SO FAR THE ND DOES NOT VIEW THE LOSS TO THE FAR RIGHT AS MUCH OF A THREAT.

4. ON THE OTHER HAND, THE ND ADHERENTS ARE SURPRISED AND MORE CONCERNED AT THE SHATTERING OF THE UNION OF THE DEMOCRATIC CENTER (UDC) WHICH IN THEIR OPINION ALLOWED THE DRAMATIC RISE OF ANDREAS PAPANDREOU'S PASOK AS AN OPPOSITION FORCE. THEY PARTICULARLY BLAME THE FORMER UDC LEADER GEORGE MAVROS FOR HIS INABILITY TO STAKE OUT HIS GROUND IN THE CENTER AND EFFECTIVELY LIMIT PAPANDREOU, THUS ALLOWING PASOK TO GAIN A GROWING MOMENTUM WHICH EVENTUALLY ALSO SIPHONED AWAY SUPPORT FROM THE ND. MOREOVER, THEY ARGUE THAT PAPANDREOU EMPLOYED UNBRIDLED DEMAGOGY IN WOOLING THE ELECTORATE, ESPECIALLY THE RURAL VOTE, BY MAKING PROMISES WHICH

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WERE IMPOSSIBLE TO KEEP. BUT OBJECTIVE ND SUPPORTERS ADMIT READILY THAT AS THE INCUMBENTS, ND SPOKESMEN DID NOT DO AN ADEQUATE JOB IN RESPONDING TO PAPANDREOU'S ATTACKS ON GOG POLICIES OR IN PRESENTING THEIR OWN CASE TO THE PEOPLE. AND THEY ARE CLEARLY IMPRESSED AT THE FINANCING AND ADEPT ORGANIZATION OF PASOK'S CAMPAIGN.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 ATHENS 10966

BRUSSELS FOR USEEC

THEY POINT OUT THIS CAMPAIGN WAS ACTUALLY CARRIED OUT STEADILY AND IN A MODERN FASHION OVER A PERIOD OF THREE YEARS WHEREAS THE ND PARTY AND OTHERS HAD BEEN NEGLIGENT, ATTEMPTING TO GAIN VOTER ALLEGIANCES ONLY IN THE LAST MONTHS BEFORE THE ELECTIONS. THEY CLAIM FURTHER THAT PAPANDREOU'S APPEAL TO YOUTH WAS ESPECIALLY IMPORTANT IN RURAL AREAS SINCE EDUCATED UNIVERSITY STUDENTS WOULD VISIT THE VILLAGES FROM WHICH THEY CAME AND EXERCISE UNUSUAL INFLUENCE OVER THE OPINIONS OF THEIR LESS SOPHISTICATED ELDERS.

5. NOR HAS CARAMANLIS BEEN WHOLLY FREE FROM CRITICISM BY SOME ND ELEMENTS. THEY BLAME HIM FOR HAVING MISJUDGED THE MOOD OF THE COUNTRY IN CALLING FOR EARLY ELECTIONS. FURTHERMORE, THEY ALLEGE, AS PARTY LEADER CARAMANLIS DID NOT TAKE TO THE OFFENSIVE AGAINST PASOK, BUT RATHER ADOPTED A SOMEWHAT DIFFIDENT, PERHAPS OVERCONFIDENT, ATTITUDE. WHILE CARAMANLIS' STANCE, THEY CONCEDE, CORRECTLY WAS AIMED AT AVOIDING THE CREATION OF TENSION AND BITTER ANTAGONISMS, THE CONSEQUENCE WAS THAT THE CAMPAIGN FAILED TO STIMULATE THE ELECTORATE IN FAVOR OF THE ND. AND IN A CAMPAIGN WHERE TELEVISION APPARENTLY PLAYED AN INCREASINGLY INFLUENTIAL ROLE, CARAMANLIS' REFUSAL TO USE THE SECOND OF TWO TV 12-MINUTE CONFIDENTIAL

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SPOTS ALLOTTED TO THE ND PARTY AT THE END OF THE CAMPAIGN IS SEEN BY HIS DISPARAGERS AS HAVING COST THE PARTY AT LEAST A FEW PERCENTAGE POINTS.

6. THERE ARE ALSO THE INEVITABLE COMPLAINTS THAT GREECE'S "FRIENDS" HAVE NOT HELPED THE CARAMANLIS GOVERNMENT ENOUGH. THE EC COUNTRIES, CONTEND THE CRITICS, HURT CARAMANLIS BY RAISING OBSTACLES AND THUS SLOWING THE PACE OF THE NEGOTIATIONS OVER GREECE'S ENTRY INTO THE EC, AND THE INDIVIDUAL GREEK VOTER IS BECOMING TROUBLED OVER THE APPARENT LACK OF SINCERITY ON THE PART OF THE EC. FINALLY, THE US AND THE WESTERN EUROPEANS ARE TAKEN TO TASK FOR NOT BRINGING SUFFICIENT PRESSURE TO MOVE TURKEY TOWARDS AN ACCEPTABLE SETTLEMENT ON THE SENSITIVE CYPRUS QUESTION. THIS NEGATIVE ATTITUDE BY THE WEST, SAY THE DETRACTORS, HAS BEEN DETRIMENTAL TO CARAMANLIS WHOSE MAIN FOREIGN POLICY THRUST HAS

BEEN TO ESTABLISH GREECE FIRMLY IN THE WEST. SEVERAL DEPUTIES CITED TO US THE DIFFICULTY THEY SAID THEY HAD IN RESPONDING TO VOTERS' QUESTIONS DURING THE CAMPAIGN AS TO WHY THE US AND THE EC COUNTRIES, IF THEY WERE TRUE ALLIES OF GREECE, ABSTAINED ON THE "VOTE AGAINST TURKEY" DURING THE DEBATE ON THE CYPRUS QUESTION IN THE UNGA.

7. IN CONCLUSION, THE NEW DEMOCRACY PARTY IS SOMEWHAT DISAPPOINTED AT ITS PERFORMANCE IN THE NOVEMBER ELECTIONS, AND SEVERAL OF ITS MEMBERS HAVE SHOWN A MEASURE OF TRUCULENCE. THE GENERAL REACTION, NEVERTHELESS, HAS BEEN THAT, GIVE OR TAKE A FEW POINTS, THE 42 PERCENT WHICH THE ND WON IN THE ELECTIONS IS A RELATIVELY ACCURATE REFLECTION OF THE SUPPORT TO WHICH IT TRADITIONALLY COULD LAY CLAIM. ND DEPUTIES TALKING TO US SPEAK WITH CONFIDENCE OF THE FUTURE, ACKNOWLEDGING THAT ANDREAS PAPANDREOU WILL UNDOUBTEDLY BE A FORMIDABLE OPPONENT IN THE NEW PARLIAMENT, BUT TAKE THE LINE THAT IN THE NEXT ELECTION NEITHER HE NOR THE RIGHT WILL MAKE FURTHER INROADS ON CARAMANLIS' SUPPORT. FOR THEM TO REALIZE THIS
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OBJECTIVE, HOWEVER, MANY FACTORS WILL BE INVOLVED. THE COMPORTMENT OF THE OPPOSITION WILL BE IMPORTANT; BUT MORE SIGNIFICANT WILL BE THE SUCCESS -- OR LACK THEREOF -- OF GOG POLICIES AND THE ABILITY OF THE ND TO CAPITALIZE ON THE SUCCESS IN REACHING THE VOTER, AN EFFORT ONLY PARTIALLY REALIZED DURING THIS LAST CAMPAIGN.
MILLS

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